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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Written statement*/ submitted by the Islamic Women's Institute of Iran, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

One of the most important problems Iranian women face is the not easily changeable and restrictive traditions that have been taken for granted for centuries. Iranian society is a religious society and it's set of views and beliefs concerning women has resulted from a traditional interpretation of religion on the one hand and regional superstitions evolving over centuries of dictatorial rule, one the other. These beliefs and views have penetrated the society the legislature and the women's minds, restricting and impairing women's activities in various realms.

I. Problems grounded in tradition and culture

A few instances of restrictive traditional beliefs are:

1.A woman's most important responsibilities are taken to be housekeeping, taking care of her husband and rearing her children. Women therefore, never reckon their personal aptitudes, their body and spirit worthy of any particular value and attention.

2.Women's behavior is encouraged to be excessively altruistic toward her family.

3.Housework is demanded free of charge, is divided unfairly and is not counted as a form of national product.

4.Housework is demanded on a constant basis and the housewife is deprived of such advantages as going on leave and insurance.

5.Women of give up their education or caress on getting married.

6.Women lack self esteem which itself endorses traditional restrictions.

Naturally, cultural problems cannot be solved in a hurry but require a modification in the conscious outlook of the people and especially in that of the women in this case. The first necessary step to take would be to sensitize the society to women's problems and to enlighten the women themselves to take their problems more seriously. Women's media can play a significant role in this field so to free women from the labyrinth of restrictive tradition, it would help immensely to support and extend women's media. It would also help to acquaint young boys and girls with the realities and problems women face in the society by modifying the role of women in schoolbooks. But most important of all is to move toward a differentiation between the religious view and the traditional view of women.

II. Legal Problems Due to the Inadequacy of Laws

Women's legal problems come next to their cultural and traditional ones. Iranian civil law is based on Islamic jurisprudence and women suffer the inadequacy of laws in some areas. The behavior and demands of Iranian women are undergoing change and the existing laws are often inefficient at

solving women's current problems. As the demands of Iranian women rise the specialists in Islamic jurisprudence and the legislature have come to the conclusion that they must respond and they have actually revised some of the rules including those of divorce and child custody, after reviewing Islamic legislature. Other rules are currently under discussion in parliament such as those pertaining to women's' rights to divorce under desperate conditions.

It must be mentioned though, that because of cultural attitudes women do not take their personal issues seriously enough, therefore, they don't even make full use of the legal rights they currently posses.

III. Relative Solution of the Problem of Illiteracy and Education

In 1971, 5.6% of women living in urban areas and 17.3% of rural women were literate which added up to 25% of the women on the national scale. In the 1996 consensus, 81.7% of urban women and 62.4% of rural women were revealed to be literate which would add up to a total of 74.2% of women on the national scale. 4.9% of the women currently studying in Iran are undergoing higher education. The considerable growth in literacy rates and in the percentage of women accepted in the university entrance exams (52% in 1999 and 54% in 2000) has changed the status of Iranian women; as the number of educated women rises, so does their expectations and demands which in itself generates new issues for women. In Iran university graduates often find it difficult to get employed. This is more seriously felt in the case of women, as male managers prefer employing men rather than women, due to their personal and cultural attitudes. Solving this problem would need serious planning in the field of employment and an increase in job opportunities, especially for women, otherwise, in the near future we will be faced with a group of unemployed women with a higher educational status than men. This would aggravate gender discrimination, increasing women's prejudice against men, and would disturb the balance between men and women both in the society at large and in their families.

IV. The Socio-Political Situation

Before the Islamic Revolution a limited number of women held high governmental posts such as Ministry and membership of Parliament, but this was mainly meant for reasons of ceremony; while after the revolution souci-political activity was taken up by the community of women. They have become more active in establishing Egos and trade unions. Women participate widely in elections, both as candidates and voters, so much so that candidates who can no longer overlook women's influence, include women's issues in their candidacy programs in order to gain higher votes. The rate of female journalists is steadily rising. The quantity of female members of Parliament is increasing and the quality of their participation is now quite considerable.

Changes have developed slowly but effectively during the twenty years since the revolution and women have been gaining a separate identity. Developments in education and employment have led to a greater individuality in women who now participate with greater confidence in social matters. The decreasing rate of childbirth (4.56% from March to September 2000) reveals women's social and intellectual development. However, the most important fact of all is that the women's movement in Iran has been a spontaneous one which is of course continuing with the help of the government who now understands that women's demands are effective ones that cannot be overlooked.